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may



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may

[auxiliary verb](#)

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\ 'mā

past might \ 'mīt ; present singular and plural may

Definition of *may*

(Entry 1 of 4)

1a —used to indicate possibility or probability you may be right things you may need —sometimes used interchangeably with *can* one of those slipups that may happen from time to time— Jessica Mitford —sometimes used where *might* would be expected you may think from a little distance that the country was solid woods— Robert Frost

b : have permission to you may go now : be free to a rug on which children may sprawl— C. E. Silberman —used nearly interchangeably with *can*

c archaic : have the ability to

2 —used in auxiliary function expressing purpose or expectation I laugh that I may not weep or contingency she'll do her duty come what may or concession he may be slow but he is thorough or choice the angler may catch them with a dip net, or he may cast a large, bare treble hook— Nelson Bryant

3 —used in auxiliary function to express a wish or desire especially in prayer, imprecation, or benediction may the best man win

4 : [shall](#), [must](#) —used in law where the sense, purpose, or policy requires this interpretation

may

[noun \(1\)](#)

\ 'mā

Definition of *may* (Entry 2 of 4)

archaic

: [maiden](#)

May

[noun \(2\)](#)

\ 'mā  \

Definition of *May* (Entry 3 of 4)

1 : the fifth month of the [Gregorian calendar](#)

2 often not capitalized : the early vigorous blooming part of human life : [prime](#)

3 : the festivities of [May Day](#)

4 not capitalized

a : green or flowering branches used for May Day decorations

b : a plant that yields may: such as

(1) : [hawthorn](#)

(2) : a spring-flowering spirea

May

biographical name

\ 'mā  \

Definition of *May* (Entry 4 of 4)

Theresa (Mary) 1956– née *Theresa Mary Brasier* British prime minister (2016–2019)

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Can vs. May: Usage Guide

Auxiliary verb

Can and *may* are most frequently interchangeable in uses denoting possibility; because the possibility of one's doing something may depend on another's acquiescence, they have also become interchangeable in the sense denoting permission. The use of *can* to ask or grant permission has been common since the 19th century and is well established, although some commentators feel *may* is more appropriate in formal contexts. *May* is relatively rare in negative constructions (*mayn't* is not common); *cannot* and *can't* are usual in such contexts.

Examples of *may* in a Sentence

Noun (2) Shakespeare called it “the merry month of *May*.” The last two *Mays* have been cold and rainy.

First Known Use of *may*

Auxiliary verb

before the 12th century, in the meaning defined at [sense 1c](#)

Noun (1)

before the 12th century, in the meaning defined [above](#)

Noun (2)

12th century, in the meaning defined at [sense 1](#)

History and Etymology for *may*

Auxiliary verb

Middle English (1st & 3rd singular present indicative), from Old English *mæg*; akin to Old High German *mag* (1st & 3rd singular present indicative) have power, am able (infinitive *magan*), and perhaps to Greek *mēchos* means, expedient

Noun (1)

Middle English, from Old English *mæg* kinsman, kinswoman, maiden

Noun (2)

Middle English, from Anglo-French & Latin; Anglo-French *mai*, from Latin *Maius*, from *Maia*, Roman goddess

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Time Traveler for *may*



The first known use of *may* was before the 12th century

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may

May

[maya](#)

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[may I just say](#)

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May

noun



English Language Learners Definition of *May*

: the fifth month of the year

[See the full definition for *May* in the English Language Learners Dictionary](#)

may

helping verb

\ 'mā  \

past might \ 'mīt \; present singular & plural may

Kids Definition of *may*

1 : have permission to You *may* go now.

2 : be in some degree likely to You *may* be right.

3 —used to express a wish *May* the best man win.

4 —used to express purpose We exercise so that we *may* be strong.

May

noun

\ 'mā  \

Kids Definition of *May*

: the fifth month of the year

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mud pit

stable

state of difficulty

bag

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